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South Coast Rail Nears Midpoint of Construction

Spring 2022 is here, and this year, it brings good news: South Coast Rail Phase 1 will reach the midpoint of construction and be on its way to carrying passengers at the end of 2023. The last 12 months have brought significant progress toward reaching that goal. Those who live or work near the right-of-way (ROW) can confirm the sight of miles of busy construction. There are many accomplishments to share over the last year. Starting with the numbers, here's a snapshot of the work completed and in progress.

Completed Work

On the Fall River Secondary (FRS), the contractor has focused on these elements:

- Laid 5 of 12.1 miles of track
- Built 5 of 9 bridges and 6 of 11 culverts
- All 10 grade crossings have been completed, with the exception of some final paving
- The right-of-way (ROW) tree canopy has been cleared and track work is completed from Myrick's Junction in Berkley to Adams Lane in Berkley

A great deal of progress has also taken place on the Middleborough Secondary/New Bedford Main Line (MS/NBML):

- The ROW tree canopy has been cleared and significant track has been laid from Pilgrim Junction in Middleborough to Cotley Junction in East Taunton
- All grade crossings along the Middleborough Secondary are completed
- Work continues along the ROW from north to south and the contractor has completed 4 of 11 culverts and 5 of 18 grade crossings on the New Bedford Main Line
- 5 of 24.1 miles of track have been laid

EARLY ACTION WORK COMPLETED

SCR completed Early Action procurements of Special Trackwork and Other Track Materials, as well as replacing 44 culverts and completing cleaning and drainage improvements along the MS/NBML and FRS.

Work has been completed on the four bridge replacements and related track work at the North and South Cotley railroad bridges in Berkley, the Cedar Swamp railroad bridge in Lakeville, and the Fall Brook railroad bridge in Freetown.



Fall River Depot general site view looking south to platform and future track #1

Building a Railroad

The story of constructing a railroad is about completing the work and doing it safely. The MBTA and its contractors are using effective, safe and environmentally mindful approaches to build this railroad. In last fall's fact sheet, for example, we featured the replacement of the Assonet River Bridge. The ROW is through a heavily wooded area. To provide easier working access for the cranes and ironworkers, the bridge was constructed off-site and rolled onto the nearby track to the river site for completion. In addition to easing the construction challenge, the approach limited the environmental footprint of the construction. You can watch the time lapse video here: <https://www.mbta.com/projects/south-coast-rail/update/new-asset-river-bridge-installed>

Earth moving is another major aspect of the project. Station sites, layovers and segments of the ROW can present challenges, either needing soils removed or requiring more soil to level a site. SCR developed a plan to maximize reuse of materials where there is an excess. Reusing clean soil means not having to pay to have it removed then turning around to purchase more. SCR's soil management program has sent 25,000 cubic yards of soil to Freetown for its station and 7,000 cubic yards to Fall River. At the Weaver's Cove layover site, this excavated soil is building the foundation for six storage tracks. In all cases, soils are tested, with contaminated soils removed and properly disposed offsite as required by MA laws and regulations.

The environmental team is focusing on monitoring and meeting standards. In all construction areas, inspectors ensure that erosion controls are in place and permit requirements are being met. The team works with state and federal agencies such as the MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) where they have jurisdiction. Some responsibilities of the environmental team include:

- Protecting wetlands delineations and limits of work
- Implementing plans and protection of endangered species
- Checking stormwater controls and dewatering
- Protecting cultural resources
- Monitoring earthwork and properly managing excavated materials
- Managing work at contaminated sites and documenting compliance

The MBTA is committed to fulfilling its environmental responsibilities and meeting permit requirements.

Fencing along the MBTA's Right-of-Way

The MBTA's contractor is beginning to install fencing at locations along the Middleborough Secondary Line and Fall River Secondary railroad right-of-way. Generally, fencing is placed in areas where it will enhance safety, a high priority for the MBTA. Fencing also minimizes trespassing on the railroad right-of-way. Abutters to the railroad may see orange stakes marking survey boundaries and will notice crews working in the railroad right-of-way to install this fencing.

In some locations limited tree and brush clearing may be needed to facilitate this work. MBTA will install the typical fencing used along its properties: 6-foot-tall chain link fencing. Fences will be set on the MBTA's property line.

If you have questions about fencing, you can call the South Coast Rail hotline at (617) 222-4099 or send the team an email at:

SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us



View of ongoing chain link fence operation



The Phase 1 signal system includes purchasing and installing communications and signal cable and equipment for the entire ROW and incorporating Positive Train Control (PTC), a system that improves train safety. Our scope of work provides for testing and commissioning the new Phase 1 system to ready it for passenger service. In 2021, the MBTA began to test the more than 80 signal boxes that will support the new service. Trains need switches to operate: contractors installed 15 in 2021 and will complete 20 more this year. Drainage pipe also runs along the ROW, with 29,660 linear feet laid last year and 135,780 linear feet coming this year.

Looking Ahead

What can you expect to see in the coming months? Station sites in some locations will begin to look like what you would expect: a platform, ramps, parking areas. Signal houses will appear on concrete pads; they are an essential part of railroad operations. Many linear feet of track will be laid, a figure estimated at an impressive 188,125 linear feet.

Contractors will be installing fencing at locations along the Middleborough Secondary Line and Fall River Secondary Line ROWs. Fencing is placed in areas where it will enhance safety and minimize trespassing on the ROW. Typical MBTA fencing is 6-foot-tall chain link fencing, set along the MBTA's property line. In some locations, limited tree and brush clearing may be needed to allow fence placement.

Every activity brings the MBTA closer to service at the end of 2023. Stay tuned – there is much more to come.

Stations Are Rising

Watching SCR Phase 1 stations begin to take form is one of the most exciting elements of the program. The Fall River Depot Station at 825 Davol Street is located near the site of an original, historic station.

The photo above shows an aerial of the station site. It will include an accessible bus drop off on North Main Street, as well as parking spaces for 220 vehicles, electric vehicle charging stations, and handicapped parking. The high-level platform will be fully accessible and include two canopies. Bike parking will also be available. The station will include signage and benches.

The rendering below shows the East Taunton Station. It is the only center platform with stairs, ramps and elevators in Phase 1. It won't be long before this graphic comes to life and riders will be starting their journeys from six new stations.



Always expect a train at a rail crossing

- Slow down, look both ways and listen
- Never stop on tracks
- Cross only where designated
- Trespassing on tracks is illegal



Safety First: On and off the Rails

During active construction on South Coast Rail, safety can best be assured by the project staff and crews and those who live near or along the tracks.

On the MBTA side, all team members coordinate to maintain the highest level of safety. Project professionals conduct site walks with the sole focus of inspecting the worksite with safety in mind. These inspectors depend on a variety of tools: frequent audits and observations; building a database of ways to seek and implement improvements; and weekly meetings after site walkthroughs. The safety team uses these meetings to resolve any issues they identify while also sustaining the project's momentum and progress.

The MBTA's extensive safety network includes representatives from the contractors, MBTA, rail personnel, municipal and state authorities, and the Federal Railroad Administration. Robust channels of communication have been established throughout that network. With team members on and off the field, remote meetings support resolving issues rapidly. Text and email chains allow questions to be asked and answered quickly. Everyone involved has the authority to stop work if needed and the ability to get resolution quickly before restarting work. This strength of communication and coordination means that the team is able to stand down if a safety issue arises.

On the public side, everyone has a role in safety. Because the aging rail lines in the region have been unused or carrying only slow-moving freight trains for more than 60 years, people have gotten into the habit of walking their dogs, riding bicycles, operating all-terrain vehicles, or running along the tracks. There is no safe place to be on the tracks except in a train or at a designated public crossing. This warning has become even more important now that the right-of-way is an active construction site on MBTA property.

From the right-of-way to the neighborhood and beyond, South Coast Rail is committed to safety.

What to Know about Construction:

- Typical hours of construction are Monday-Friday, 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM or until dark; crews may arrive at construction sites prior to this time
- The exception is for track outages: these are 24-hour day work periods usually over 4-5 days; communities will be notified in advance of these events
- Construction pest and rodent management are required and ongoing
- Dust control and management are required and monitored
- All contractors and site personnel are complying with health and safety regulations regarding COVID-19

Construction Questions

To report a construction-related issue on the South Coast Rail project, call the hotline at 617-222-4099. It will be answered Monday-Friday, between 7:00 AM and 3:30 PM (except holidays). All voicemails left outside of these hours will be received on the following 7:00 AM to 3:30 PM weekday shift. We will respond to all complaints.

The SCR team is available to talk with or meet with residents, businesses and elected officials during construction to discuss issues and update stakeholders. Write us at SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us.

When Rail Ruled Southeastern MA

If you would like to learn more about the robust rail service that once served the region, watch our latest recorded presentation. It tells the story of the NY, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, which leased and operated the Old Colony Line from 1893 to 1958. Fall River played an important role in regional travel and brought passengers to Manhattan's Pier 14. Passengers rode the Fall River Rail Line to its terminus, boarding luxurious steamers for the voyage.

https://youtu.be/___zooUxHRpA





The end of the line in Fall River, where passengers once boarded a luxurious steamer to Manhattan. The steamer's smokestack is visible in the center rear behind the station.

Contact Us

For more information, contact us at:

 SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us

 617-222-4099

 To learn more about the project and sign up for email updates, visit the website at: www.mass.gov/southcoastrail

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